

# THE CASE FOR VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

THREE LECTURES GIVEN UNDER THE HEATH  
CLARK BEQUEST TO THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE  
OF INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGY

BY

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## PREFACE

IN these unprosperous days, many young people are less concerned with the difficulty of choosing suitable work than with the difficulty of finding any sort of work at all. But even to-day there are those who have some option in the matter, and one may hope that, as economic conditions improve, their number will be greatly increased. Perhaps, therefore, no apology is necessary for discussing at this time the problem of occupational choice and the need of assisting boys and girls to choose wisely.

I have not attempted in this small book to give an account of the technique of the vocational psychologist. That has already been done by various writers, and space would not permit of its being done at all adequately here. Besides, it is of little use to describe psychological methods—or, for that matter, any other methods—of vocational guidance to persons who are unconvinced of the need for them.

The subject of this book is one on which many false opinions are current, some of which have a certain plausibility because, if scarcely worthy to be called half-truths, they contain at least some fraction of truth. These opinions are continually being expressed, and they tend greatly to obscure the issue whenever the topic is under discussion. I have therefore made it

my aim to effect, if I could, a little preliminary clearing of the air. Any reader of my prolegomena who may wish to pursue the subject further will find useful guidance in the Bibliography.

A. M. .

*The National Institute of  
Industrial Psychology.*

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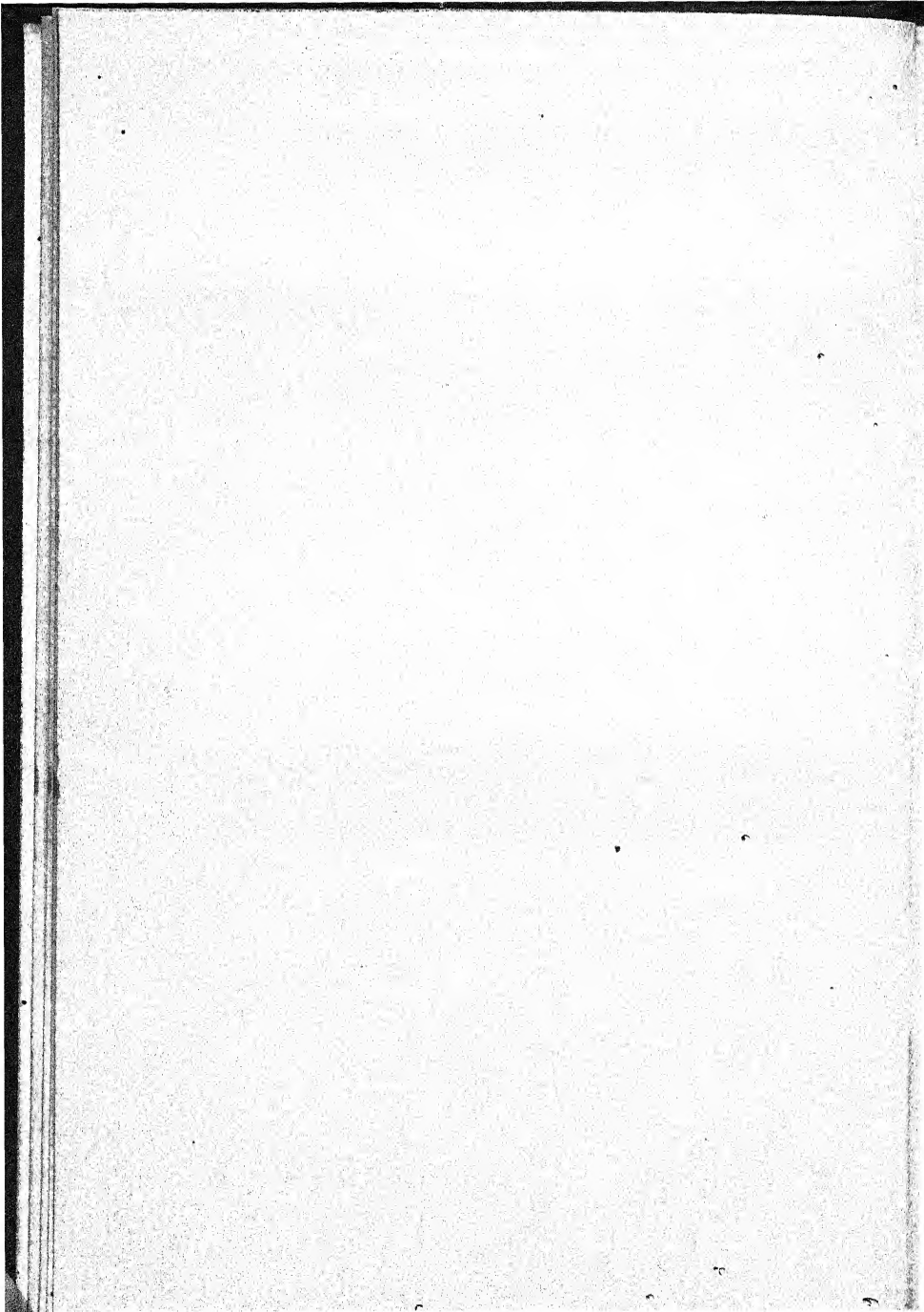
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# THE CASE FOR VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

## CHAPTER I

### OCCUPATIONAL CHOICES

"Wishes are much influenced by accidental circumstances, and what a boy wants to do may not be sufficiently in accord with what it is wise for him to attempt."

—F. M. EARLE, *Psychology and the Choice of a Career*.

In this chapter we shall consider the ways in which young people commonly choose their occupations. We shall study the reasons which they themselves offer in defence of their vocational ambitions, and we shall try to explore some of the influences which cause a boy or a girl to adopt one career in preference to another. We shall not be mainly concerned with the rightness or wrongness of the choices, their wisdom or foolishness. Doubtless, as we proceed, we shall be unable to escape reflections of that kind; but our immediate purpose is not to pass judgment, but simply to discover facts.

#### Haphazard Vocational Choices

No one who studies the subject at all can fail to be struck by the *apparently* haphazard nature of the occupational choice in many cases, and by no means only in cases of young



people of low intelligence. One of the most brilliant of our living scientists, a man who has received high honours from the State for his remarkable contributions to the advancement of learning in his own special field, once confessed that his entry into that particular field was entirely accidental. He had thought of following another career, but changed his mind for no particular reason, certainly for no good reason. And it has been written of a great judge, who died only recently, that the idea of a career at the Bar never entered his head until it was suggested to him, after he had apprenticed himself to a very different occupation, by the chance remark of an acquaintance who had admired one of his speeches at a meeting of a debating society.

Nevertheless, intelligence has something to do with the matter, and it is perhaps among the less gifted children of the elementary school that the choice of work most commonly appears to be a result of accidental circumstances rather than of careful planning. In the report of a vocational guidance experiment conducted among twelve hundred elementary-school children in London some years ago, the investigators summed up their conclusions on the subject in these words: "When the question, 'What do you want to do when you leave school?' was followed up by 'Why do you want to do that?' it was clear that many fortuitous factors were influencing the choice. Often it seemed to be a

matter of fashion, as in one school where nearly every boy wanted to become a printer, in spite of the fact that vacancies in printing were exceedingly difficult to find. It was also observed that the answer might change from week to week when the same question was put to the same child by different investigators. Clearly, many of the children had given only casual thought to the matter of a career, and many more knew so little about the occupations that it seemed impossible to take their explicit wish at its face-value" (10).<sup>1</sup>

### **Children's Reasons for Choice of Work**

When one considers the immaturity of the normal child of 13 or 14, one can scarcely wonder at the rather trivial reasons often given by such children in justification of their choice of work. Frequently the attraction seems to be due to some quite superficial aspect or merely incidental advantage of the occupation, as in the case of a boy who stated that he wished to become a carpenter so that he might be of use to his mother by mending her broken chairs. In other cases the child appears simply to tumble into a job without attempting to exercise any choice at all. It is true that his family circumstances are often such that he cannot afford to pick and choose; he must avail himself of the first opportunity of earning that presents itself. But it

<sup>1</sup> Throughout the book numbers shown in parentheses indicate publications referred to in the Bibliography.



is questionable whether the lack of a definite vocational ambition in the child leaving the elementary school can usually be attributed solely to financial stress in the home. As might be expected, occupational aimlessness tends to be found among young people whose inferiority is not limited to their social condition. This fact has recently been demonstrated by Bevington (3) in a study of two hundred unemployed lads, 40 per cent of whom admitted that they had made no vocational plans at the time of leaving school. The following quotations are typical of their statements: "When I left school, like a boy, I was eager to get work, and stupidly took just the first thing that came along in a cable company that a friend told me of"; "When I left school I was ready to take anything, and I saw a notice up in a grocery shop window, 'Boy Wanted,' so I went there"; "I didn't mind what work I got, and my father left it to me to get what I could. I went to an engineering firm and liked it all right, but my mother made me give my notice in, as I got so dirty." It was found that these aimless lads came from homes where, on the average, the families were relatively large and the fathers were relatively unskilled workers. But it was found also that, on the average, they had received comparatively poor reports on character from their head teachers, and had been comparatively unsuccessful in their school work (their intelligence, as distinguished from their

achievements, was not ascertained). Their industrial records also were inferior, as estimated in terms of occupational stability, wages earned and future prospects. To arrange these various findings precisely in a causal sequence is a nice problem which need not trouble us here. It is sufficient for our present purpose to note the fact that many a child apparently just drifts from school to work, and to note the probability that his unpremeditated acceptance of his first job is not wholly a matter of economic necessity.

### Studies of Occupational Choices

Various attempts have been made to investigate systematically the occupational choices of older boys and girls in secondary and central schools. The investigators have asked the pupils to write down the names of the occupations that have appealed to them, and to explain why these occupations have appealed. They have then analysed the statements of the young people in order to discover the relative frequency or importance of the various factors influencing the choices. It must be admitted that inquiries conducted in this way by written questionnaires are necessarily of a somewhat superficial character. Nevertheless, the results are not without interest and value, and they may well occupy our attention for a little here.

At the National Institute of Industrial Psychology a special form has been devised, on which applicants for guidance in the choice of a career

are invited to explain their own vocational preferences. A study has recently been made of the statements entered on this form in fifty consecutive cases of boys and girls educated in secondary or "selective central" schools in London. Thirty of the subjects were boys, and twenty girls. The majority were of superior intelligence when judged by carefully determined standards for young people of similar age and education. Of the whole group of fifty, only five were considerably below the average in intelligence, while eleven were considerably above the average. Let us consider, first of all, some typical examples of the occupations primarily chosen by these young people, and the reasons given for the choices.

*University Lecturer (Boy, age 18).* "The job is safe. One associates with educated people. There is scope for carrying on other occupations in one's spare time. The social life attached to college is attractive. There is an absence, to a certain extent, of monotonous work. One would probably avoid the daily crush in trains, etc., in which city workers are involved."

*Secondary School Teacher (Girl, age 18).* "I am interested in children and would like to handle them. In studying to become a secondary school teacher I shall have to go to a University, and therefore at the same time I am training for a profession. I am also getting a liberal education. I shall have an opportunity to indulge in other activities, since the hours are not long."

*Pathologist (Boy, age 17).* "I have always had a liking for Botany and Biology. I am fascinated by dissection. I have confidence in elementary first aid. It is a sound job, with income to follow if successful. There is a possibility of travel and mixing with society."

*Farm Worker (Girl, age 17).* "It naturally appeals to me. One is in the open air. I like all animals, but not the insect class."

*Electrical Research Worker (Boy, age 16).* "I have a fairly good working knowledge of electricity. I am good at all kinds of mechanical drawing. The industry offers better chances of promotion than most jobs. I am fond of experimenting at home with things mechanical."

*Wireless Officer (Boy, age 16).* "I am very interested in wireless and television and have some knowledge of both. They are sciences that have a future before them. Such occupations would hold my interest. Ship's wireless officer would provide opportunities to save money."

*Solicitor (Boy, age 16).* "I think it would be interesting. Success depends on being able to state your case clearly and to speak well. I speak fairly well and I think I could get on all right so far as that is concerned."

*Journalist (Girl, age 16).* "I am very interested in that sort of English writing, and I should be able to go around to various places and not have absolutely fixed routine."

*Traveller Abroad (Boy, age 16).* "I am interested in geography and the people of other

nations. Also I expect to go to the Scouts' World Jamboree at Budapest in the summer."

*Bank Clerk (Girl, age 16).* "It is a comparatively safe, well-paid job, and interesting too, the figure work not being unduly complicated. I have three friends in banks and all are happy and contented with their jobs and speak of the goodness and generosity of the bank officials. Not one of the three is outstandingly brilliant, so that the general level of work to begin with can't be so terribly above me."

*Civil Service Clerk (Girl, age 15).* "It is a very steady reliable job. Although the wages are not high, you are considered by the number of years you are there, which is, I think, very fair, as I am not brilliant."

*Air Pilot (Boy, age 15).* "I should like to see the world by having an aeroplane of my own. It is one of the most up-to-date ways of travelling."

*Dispenser (Girl, age 15).* "The life appeals to me. I have always been very interested in science. The white overall and the disinfectant smell have always given the work a very clean and healthy effect. To measure out amounts of substance and to think the least grain and mistake counts, gives the job a sense of great responsibility."

*Milliner (Girl, age 15).* "I should like to be a milliner so that you could choose your own style of hats. It is interesting work, as every season there is a new style."



*Printer (Boy, age 15).* "I have no reason for liking it, because I do not know anything about it, but it just appeals to me."

### Analysis of Reasons for Choice

• As these examples show, the statements vary considerably, both in quantity and in quality. When, however, the whole group of fifty cases is studied, certain general tendencies emerge fairly clearly. In the first place, it is noteworthy that by far the most common reason given for choosing a particular career is simply *a feeling of liking for, or interest in, the job chosen* (or some aspect of the job chosen). The feeling is expressed in such phrases as these: "the job is *one of the most appealing* to me"; "I have *always liked the idea* of this kind of work"; "I feel *I would enjoy it*"; "the work is *very interesting*." Statements of this kind occur in 70 per cent of the cases, and sometimes such a statement is the main, or even the sole, reason offered. Thus, a girl wishes to take up book-keeping "owing to its being *so interesting*, although it requires a lot of work and patience and I am only moderately good at it." And a boy who would like to become a teacher gives no other reason than this: "I feel *I should like* such a job and would be *very interested*." This question of interest is one that we shall return to later.

Secondly, it would seem that the choice of work is very commonly influenced by *a comparative aptitude or liking for a particular school*



*subject* which is thought (sometimes erroneously) to be of some importance in the job selected. For example, a would-be journalist explains that he is "quite proficient in essay writing"; and a boy who contemplates entering a bank states that this ambition is mainly due to his "natural ability for, and great interest in, mathematics." Reasons of this kind are given in 40 per cent of the cases. One or two of these cases, in which the emphasis is on *interest* rather than on *ability* in the school subject, have been included in the total of 70 per cent given in the last paragraph, but that total is made up mainly of cases in which the interests, at least as described by the boys and girls, are of a more vague or general sort. In 20 per cent of the whole group of cases, however, reference is made both to an *interest in the occupation* and to an *ability in a school subject* more or less closely connected with the occupation, and no doubt there is some causal relationship between the two factors.

The other statements made in explanation of the occupational preferences fall naturally into two classes: there are those which describe the *advantages and attractions of the jobs chosen*, and those which express a belief in some degree of *personal fitness for the jobs chosen*. Here a third striking fact is disclosed by the analysis; namely, that statements of the latter kind are conspicuous by their rarity. Apart from questions of scholastic proficiency, *there would seem to be scarcely any attempt to study natural abilities*

*or qualities in relation to the requirements of the work desired.* The tendency is to consider, not what the individual can bring to the job, but rather what the job can offer to the individual.

Of the occupational advantages the most sought-after appear to be of the economic kind: *security of position, good pay, and good prospects of advancement.* Forty per cent of the statements include references to one or more of these three merits. Other attractions are *opportunities of travel* (mentioned in 18 per cent of the cases), *outdoor work* (14 per cent), and *absence of monotony* (10 per cent). A few individuals refer to the desirability of *short hours, ample holidays, and opportunities for sport.* To mention only three additional examples, there is a girl who looks forward to *a chance of mixing with different types of people*; a boy who feels the appeal of work that *does a tremendous amount of good*; and another boy who enjoys the thought of *working with his head rather than with his hands.*

While thirty-five boys and girls (70 per cent of the whole group) give one or more statements of the kind described in the last paragraph, only six mention the suitability of their personal qualifications (other than scholastic aptitudes) for the work desired. Of these six, two are boys who have excelled in games: the one would like to be a sports master and the other a professional footballer. Then there is the budding solicitor who "can speak fairly well," the would-be pathologist who has "confidence in elementary



first aid," and the boy who has experimented at home (no doubt successfully) with "things mechanical." Finally, there is a boy who has tested his suitability for the Fire Service by gaining experience as a volunteer in the local fire brigade. Perhaps there should be included also in this category the two girls who mention a kind of *negative* fitness for the jobs selected: the one concludes that a Civil Service career is an appropriate choice for a person who is "not brilliant," and the other comforts herself with the reflection that, whatever may be her positive suitability for work in a bank, at least "the general level of work to begin with can't be so terribly above me."

### **An Experiment with Undergraduates**

When the questionnaire used in the study that has just been described was completed recently by a group of university undergraduates of both sexes, it was found that the answers of these young men and women did not differ markedly in general character from those given by school pupils. In particular, the outward look, directed to the merits of the job rather than to the merits of the person choosing the job, was much the more common, although considerations of personal fitness were not entirely neglected, as the first two of the following quotations show.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Acknowledgment is due to Mr. C. A. Mace, M.A., for kind assistance in this inquiry.

*Nursing.* "Nursing appeals because it makes demands on sympathy. Then it gives scope for manual as well as intellectual work. Hospital life appeals to me and I seem to have qualities suitable for the work—gentleness of manner, soft movements, good hands, enough patience, etc."

*Sailing.* "For sentimental reasons largely (family inheritance!). Also, I consider myself physically, and otherwise, well fitted for the job—natural aptitude, in fact, plus a certain amount of first-hand knowledge."

*The Ministry.* "The Ministry appeals to me as a profession because it would seem to offer a life of reflection rather than of action. I am also, I admit, attracted by the position of respect and dignity which clergymen seem to occupy amongst their fellow men. In addition, I believe that this profession would allow me sufficient leisure to pursue subjects in which I am interested."

*Teaching.* "I appreciate knowledge, especially of the literary variety, for its own sake, and desire to impart it to others."

*Diplomatic Service.* "An interesting and varied life. Unrivalled opportunity for meeting outstanding people. A position in which one could be well dressed."

### Other Investigations

Other investigators who have studied the subject by similar methods have arrived at

somewhat similar conclusions. In an extensive inquiry conducted by C. W. Valentine and F. M. Ritchie (30) among secondary-school pupils, the subjects were first invited to state spontaneously the reasons for their vocational choices; secondly, they were asked to select, from a comprehensive list provided, those motives which had influenced their decisions, and to indicate which of the motives had had the most powerful influence. When the combined results of the two parts of the inquiry were studied, it was found that a *liking for the work* was the most common reason offered both by the boys (90 per cent) and by the girls (67 per cent). The second motive in order of frequency was the desire for *good pay*. Next came the desire for *security*. A feeling of *special fitness for the work* was mentioned by 54 per cent of the boys, but was included among the four most influential reasons by only 39 per cent. This motive was mentioned by a much smaller percentage of the girls. The *liking for a particular school subject* was given as a *main* reason by one-third of the boys and one-quarter of the girls. The "*respectability motive*," exemplified by a desire to avoid dirty work or to achieve a position in which a secondary education would not be wasted, was fairly common among the boys but was rarely mentioned by the girls.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Since this chapter was written, C. W. Valentine has described a smaller investigation among working lads attending evening classes in a technical college. The results are in general agreement with those here reported (29).

In an investigation among one hundred and twenty-five pupils, constituting the "freshman" class of an American high school, a list of twenty-three reasons was supplied to the boys and girls, who apparently were required to indicate the *one* motive to which their occupational choices were primarily due. Forty-nine per cent of the subjects selected one or another of these three reasons: "I *like* this kind of work"; "I am *interested* in this type of work"; "I *always desired it* since I can remember." Thirty-one per cent appear to have been mainly influenced by considerations of *security* and *prospects*. Only five per cent gave the reason, "I seem to be *best fitted* for this type of work," and one per cent the reason, "My *training and qualifications* are along this line" (21).

Quite recently, Hawkins<sup>1</sup> has studied the vocational inclinations of the pupils attending a selective central school in the Midlands. These pupils were asked to state not only the occupations which they would *like* to follow, but also the occupations which they would *decline* to follow. The investigator has thus summed up his conclusions: "We can now see on what factors the pupils of this school as a whole are mainly basing their choices and refusals of occupation most frequently. These motives are *cleanliness, pay, security, health, and a liking for the work*. . . . It is also evident that there are

<sup>1</sup> Acknowledgment is due to the University of Birmingham, as well as to Mr. Hawkins himself, for kind permission to quote from his unpublished work.

certain reasons which are of primary importance in choosing a really suitable occupation, but which are rarely mentioned at all; these are *suitability of the individual concerned, mentally, physically, or in temperament or character* " (15).

### Limitations of Questionnaire Studies

Now, it cannot be claimed that inquiries such as we have been considering are of an extremely penetrating character. It is true that they reveal certain interesting and important tendencies: there can be no real doubt, for example, that many boys and girls, in thinking about their future work in the world, do in fact attach great importance to their scholastic successes, or that many make little attempt to take stock of their natural characteristics. But we must be careful to avoid the error of supposing that young people, although it often appears that they cannot be trusted to make a careful choice of occupation, are nevertheless eminently to be relied upon when it is a matter of furnishing complete and accurate explanations of their choices. The critical reader who has had the patience to follow the argument thus far will have arrived, quite rightly, at the conclusion that our statistics are not always very exact, nor very meaningful.

It is certain that the child's reasons are by no means always so incomplete as his statement of them might suggest. This becomes very evident when, as in our own cases at the National



Institute of Industrial Psychology, the matter is subsequently discussed with the boy or girl in a personal interview. It is then found quite frequently that there are notable omissions in the written explanation of the choice. These omissions are not invariably due to oversight or laziness. To mention a common case, the adolescent, despite his reputation for altruism, may be rather reluctant to admit that his plans for the future have been influenced by a desire to serve humanity. He may not find it easy to express an aspiration of that kind in cold ink; perhaps to do so savours a little of priggishness. But he will often, as the saying is, "come out with it" when a certain glow of confidence has been established by a patient interviewer.

Perhaps it was modesty that prevented the girl who wished to teach (because, as she wrote, she "would like to handle children") from vouchsafing the important information that, as senior prefect in her school, she had already handled children with considerable success. There can be little doubt that this unmentioned experience had something to do with the formation, or at least with the confirmation, of her vocational choice.

Sometimes, again, it appears that the child's account of his occupational preferences is merely an echo of the wishes of his parents. A girl, for example, who had expressed an interest in various other careers, admitted in the interview that her real desire was to become a nurse.

This occupation was not looked upon with favour by her parents, who considered it insufficiently remunerative. We shall have more to say on the subject of parents in Chapter III.

It might be thought that more full and candid reports would be obtained if the questionnaires were answered anonymously; yet even when this is done, as it was by certain members of our undergraduate group, one sometimes hesitates to accept the written statements as complete accounts of the young persons' reflections on the matter. Another device which is designed to encourage completeness of explanation is that of providing the subject with a printed list of reasons which he is required to check. This plan, however, would seem to have the disadvantage of increasing the probability, which is always present, that some of the individuals will give reasons which they recognize as sensible, although these reasons may have had remarkably little to do with the motivation of their occupational decisions. No doubt this is usually done from a desire to please, rather than to deceive; and so we are led to consider the chief weakness of investigations of the kind just reported.

#### **"Rationalization" of Motives for Choice**

It is quite wrong to assume that a child who desires to follow a particular calling must be able to furnish a logical justification of this desire. His choice may have been mainly a

matter of *feeling*, and logic may have entered into it very little indeed. As we have repeatedly observed, one of the most common statements made in explanation of vocational preferences is the statement of a *liking* for, or an *interest* in, the work; and probably there are many cases in which, so far as the child can truthfully tell, this is all that there is to be said about the matter. But, since the mere fact of choice would seem usually to imply an interest in the work chosen, the statement of the interest is not so much an *explanation* as merely a *reaffirmation* of the child's desire. Is it not a little ridiculous to call this a "reason"? To announce to the world that, let us say, 50 per cent of children have been discovered to choose their jobs because they are interested in them seems to be very like announcing that in 50 per cent of cases no discovery of the causes of the choices has been made at all. To find the cause of the choice we must surely seek the *cause of the interest*; and here the boy or girl may be quite unable to enlighten us. But adolescent boys and girls are kindly disposed creatures. Is it not, then, very possible that some of them, having in truth no *reasons* to offer for their choices, are nevertheless only too delighted to invent a few reasons on the spot, in order to avoid disappointing an earnest and optimistic worker in the cause of science?

Further, in addition to any such deliberate distortion of the facts, there is certainly in many



cases a distortion of an entirely involuntary and unconscious kind. As we have just stated, vocational choices (like many other human activities) may proceed not so much from reason as from impulse. But our pride in being rational animals is so great that we like to think that our behaviour is always rationally based. Consequently, having acted without stopping to reason why, we sometimes proceed to find reasons for our actions *after the event*. It may be, indeed, that excellent reasons are easily found, but in imagining that these reasons have been the *cause* of our conduct we often deceive ourselves. Now, it would seem that the reasons given by the adolescent for his occupational choice are often no more than "rationalizations." He has been directly attracted to the work, but he must needs justify this attraction to himself and to others by logical argument, and he may fully believe that his logic provides the true explanation of the matter. A speaker at a recent religious conference was reported to have remarked that "a man might become a missionary from the noblest, most self-sacrificing motives, or because he took pleasure in bossing an inferior race." The statement is doubtless true, but it is unlikely that a man actuated by the latter motive would himself be conscious of that motive. Probably his own perfectly sincere account of the matter would be calculated to mislead an inquiring psychologist who depended solely on the method of the questionnaire.

**Instinctive Tendencies and Occupational Choices**

What, then, are these non-rational impulses which determine human conduct generally and vocational decisions in particular? Many psychologists call them "instincts" and believe that they are part of the native constitution of the mind, tendencies to action with which we are endowed at birth. The generally accepted list of human instincts is a comparatively short one, containing little more than a dozen names: instincts of combat and escape, of self-assertion and self-submission, of curiosity and acquisitiveness, the gregarious or social instinct, the mating or sex instinct, the parental or protective instinct, and so on. These tendencies are thought to have been inherited by man from his animal ancestors, in whom they served to secure the self-preservation of the individual and the survival of the species; and among human beings it is not very difficult to observe instances of instinctive behaviour which recall the crudity of life in the jungle. Very commonly, however, human instincts are so modified in their operation, both as regards the situations which call them into play and as regards the manner of their expression, that most people fail to recognize them as instinctive at all. For instance, the barrister, busily engaged in the highly intellectual process of demolishing the arguments of opposing counsel, may at the same time be finding satisfaction for a "sublimated" instinct of combat. Although employing the

refined weapon of his intellect, he may be actuated in part by the same impulse as prompted his remote ancestors to use the more primitive instruments of tooth and claw. And both his success and his enjoyment in his work may be partly due to the fact that it provides an indirect outlet for this strong elemental tendency of his nature.

It is not difficult to see how a young person's vocational desires and aversions may be connected with his instinctive tendencies. An individual in whom the protective instinct is strongly developed may be drawn to occupations such as those of the shepherd, the nurse, and the teacher. Another, possessed of a marked instinct of self-display, may be prompted to adopt a career on the theatrical stage. Another, relatively weak in the gregarious and self-assertive instincts, may loathe the intercourse of the market-place and seek the comparative seclusion of the office or the laboratory. Probably most vocational choices are influenced, at least to some extent, by impulses of this kind. Is it likely that our brilliant scientist's decision was so accidental as he imagines it to have been? No doubt his instinct of curiosity had something to do with it. As for the great judge, to say that his choice of the Bar was due to the chance remark of a fellow member of a debating society is obviously to give a very incomplete account of the matter; why, one may ask, had he taken the trouble to join a debating society at all?

And even the case of the urchin who drifted into the grocer's shop when he happened to observe the notice in the window was probably not a case of pure drifting. Is it not likely that many a boy, just as eager to find a job, would have passed that notice by?

The instinctive response is immediate and is commonly accompanied by considerable strength of feeling. The animal whose instinct of escape has been stimulated by the sight of a natural enemy does not waste any time in thinking. It runs away at once, because it is its nature to run away at once from that particular kind of situation. The action has a compulsive character and brooks no interference. Hence the intense ardour with which a young person, deaf to the dictates of reason, will pursue a vocational aim when the occupation, or some aspect of it, has aroused one of his dominant instinctive tendencies.

### The Influence of "Sentiments"

But these strong vocational inclinations cannot be explained simply by reference to inborn dispositions. *Acquired* tendencies, built up on the native groundwork of instinct by the influences of the social environment, are also of much importance. Consider the case of a boy who at an early age happens to meet a missionary from the Gold Coast. The boy's instinct of curiosity is stimulated by the missionary's tales of black people and their strange customs. His parents

are religious people who foster his interest in the subject. He is provided with books about the great missionaries of the past. The more he reads, the more does his interest grow. Round the idea of missionary work he gradually builds up what psychologists call a "sentiment." As he grows older, additional instincts become incorporated in the sentiment; the protective instinct, for example. The life of the missionary appeals to his desire for service as well as to his desire for adventure. So closely does he identify himself with missionary workers that when he hears them criticized he is as angry as he would be if a member of his own family were insulted. And when he ultimately decides to become a missionary himself, it is not the whole truth to say that the choice is due to this or that or the other inborn instinct. It results rather from a complex mental attitude which, although doubtless instinctive at the core, has been *shaped by individual experience*. Another boy, with a very similar instinctive endowment, but brought up in a different home and subjected to different influences, might acquire just as powerful a sentiment for the Indian Army.

### Vocational Aims and Abnormal Tendencies

We have not yet come to the end of the matter. We have been considering normal cases, but there are also cases in which vocational aims are influenced by mental tendencies of a more or less abnormal kind. For instance, there are



persons who, to a much more than ordinary degree, find satisfaction in inflicting physical pain or mental humiliation on their fellows; to such persons the work of the magistrate or the income-tax inspector may appeal irresistibly. Again, there are individuals whose vocational inclinations may be due to morbid sexual tendencies: the youth with a "fetish" for women's shoes may be drawn to the trade of the shoemaker; the male "homosexual" of a certain type, so psychiatrists tell us, commonly seeks a sublimated expression of his abnormal tendencies in the work of the dress designer; and it is possible that the psychiatrist's own choice of work may sometimes be due in part to a strange aberration of his sexual impulse.<sup>1</sup>

A great variety of minor maladjustments and errors of development in the adolescent may play some part in shaping his vocational ambitions. The girl, for example, who is anxious to become a kennel-maid sometimes seems to be a girl who has acquired a faulty attitude towards human beings. Maltreated at home, misunderstood in school, she hopes to find among the dogs the friendship which she imagines to be denied to her by a hostile world of men. In a

<sup>1</sup> The *fetichist* is a person whose sex instinct is not stimulated in the normal way, but to whom a particular part of the body (such as the hair or the foot) or an article of clothing is a source of sexual excitement. The *homosexual* is a person whose affections are directed towards others of the same sex. The *psychiatrist* is a person who treats mental and nervous disorders by psychological methods often involving an exploration of unconscious motives, and who sometimes seems excessively prone to trace all manner of troubles to a sexual origin.

study of the motives of young people who had chosen the teaching profession, Austin has observed that "some children seem to be under the sway of the tendency not to grow up when they choose to be teachers. As they put it themselves, they 'feel at home with children and out of place with their elders,' and the teaching profession seems to them a refuge from a world of grown-ups" (2). Again, the young person with some particular weakness of body or mind often dreams of following a career demanding a high degree of the very quality in which he is most deficient. Demosthenes provides the classical example of a successful attempt to realize such a "compensatory fantasy" in action. Unfortunately, many boys and girls suffer from defects that are less easily remedied than a stammer. An intelligent boy of indifferent physique, anaemic, defective in vision, and with chronic respiratory trouble, was extremely anxious to become an air pilot. His reason—or, rather, rationalization—was that he had a good "sense of balance" in swimming, a gift which could not fail to be of advantage to him in flying.

But fantasies are not always of the compensatory kind. The adolescent is notoriously a dreamer, and many cases in which the occupational aim shows a certain lack of appreciation of the hard facts of reality are perhaps scarcely to be considered abnormal, although they may be difficult enough to deal with. Naturally

enough, such cases seem to be most frequent among the children of the well-to-do. Every vocational adviser knows the public-school boy who scorns the idea of following any ordinary humdrum professional calling. He must hitch his wagon to a brighter star, and he will be satisfied with nothing less than the job of the film producer. Often the impracticability of the aim is less clearly realized than it was in the following case, described by Austin—although, indeed, failure to realize it here would scarcely have been compatible with sanity. A secondary-school girl of 16 thus began her description of her vocational longings—

“Where the ancient kings and princes  
Lived in palaces and mansions,  
Where the queens and bashful maidens  
Sighed by balconies and turrets,  
Where the knights in shining armour  
Fought in tournaments with lances,  
I would live and be a jester,  
Be the fool of one ‘Prince Labour.’  
For to-day the modern people  
Work if they are worth their wisdom;  
Nothing can be gained by dreaming.  
He who means to find the true life,  
Find the purpose of all living,  
Must be strong and very plucky,  
Must have will-power, nerve and courage.  
And since I am very feeble,  
I would leave the modern people.  
I would go and be a jester  
To a King in ancient history . . .”

The reasons given by this girl for her vocational desire were as follows: “Because it is wholly



impossible, but if it were possible, (1) it requires skill rather than labour, (2) the hours are easy—where sorrow is not, time cannot be counted, (3) it offers great prospect of advance—in wisdom—which is, after all, the only thing worth while" (2).

Finally, there are young people who make no choice of work at all. We are not now thinking of those who are forced by economic necessity to "take the first thing that comes along," or are aimless because they fail to realize the importance of having an aim. Some boys and girls who are pathetically anxious to acquire a plan of life seem incapable of attempting to make one for themselves. Often in such cases it appears that the child's development has not proceeded quite normally. Perhaps he has been too much sheltered or too much dragooned by his parents, who have never encouraged him to acquire any measure of independence, so that the necessity of vocational choice, signaling the end of childhood and the first acceptance of the responsibilities of the adult, finds him irresolute and afraid.

### Conclusion

Perhaps enough has been written to show that the matter is not simple. When we ask boys and girls to tell us why they are attracted to particular callings, we may well be asking them to do the impossible. But when we study their statements in the light of our knowledge of their

personal characteristics and past history, we can often discover probable causes or part-causes of their vocational ambitions, although to find the whole truth of the matter might entail a much more intensive search (including an exploration of the individual's unconscious mind) than would be at all practicable. At least, it is easy enough in most cases to arrive at a conclusion of a negative kind; namely, that the vocational choice has *not* been based on anything like a careful or comprehensive survey of the qualifications of the individual for the work desired. And since our aim in this chapter has been to investigate, and not to criticize, we shall leave the matter there for the present.

## CHAPTER II

### OCCUPATIONAL MISFITS

"Throughout the length and breadth of the land, men and women are being employed and set at tasks for which they are not qualified or for which they are only partly qualified. And the cost in production to industry and the cost in happiness to themselves is a total defying estimate."

—W. D. SCOTT, R. C. CLOTHIER, and S. B. MATHEWSON,  
*Personnel Management.*

IN the last chapter we tried to explore the origins of the vocational choices of adolescent boys and girls. We must now proceed to consider the probable results of these choices. On the whole, do they seem likely to turn out satisfactorily, or are they such that we should expect to discover a great multitude of occupational misfits in the world? With this question in mind let us briefly review our findings.

#### **Review of Previous Findings**

In the first place, it need scarcely be pointed out that the reasons given by the young people themselves for their occupational aims are in most cases extremely inadequate. We have seen that the usual tendency is to study the advantages of the job and to neglect to study the requirements of the job. Now, clearly, there can be no certainty that a boy who decides to take up printing merely because this is reputed to be a "good trade" will prove to have the makings of a good printer; and if a girl is to become a

successful schoolmistress, she undoubtedly must possess a number of qualities that are not necessarily associated with the desire for a secure position and long holidays.

It is clear also that, even when the boy or girl does study the demands of the work, he or she almost invariably takes a rather superficial or one-sided view of these demands. In most cases the statement (if any) as to personal fitness for the occupation desired consists merely of a reference to success in a particular school subject. Of course, no one would deny that a special scholastic aptitude should receive careful consideration, but when, as so frequently seems to be the case, it is made the main ground of the choice, there are obvious possibilities of danger ahead. The boy who is "fairly proficient in essay writing" may in other respects be extremely unfitted for journalism, and to possess a "natural aptitude for mathematics" is by no means a sure guarantee of happiness in the work of the bank clerk. Further, it sometimes appears that the choice is influenced by an *interest* in a subject in which the individual confesses that he has no great *ability*. Interest and aptitude do not invariably go together. Again, it is not uncommonly found that the importance attached to the scholastic ability is out of all proportion to the part played by that ability in determining success in the occupation. One of the cases studied by Valentine and Ritchie was that of a boy who had been enraptured by his studies of



chemistry. "I like to wonder," he wrote, "at the infinitely marvellous problem of the atom, the molecule. It seems to me that this is one of the most, if not the most, wonderful of God's creations." This boy intended to become an analyst or a pharmaceutical chemist; but, as the investigators remark, "to what extent will his love for chemistry avail him if he has to spend most of his time handing patent medicines over a counter or making up prescriptions of sodium bicarbonate and *aqua pura* in the requisite proportions?" (30)

We saw, indeed, that the statements of the boys and girls are often incomplete and do not represent truly their full reflections on the subject of their future careers. But even when boys and girls discuss their aims with the greatest candour in a personal interview, one is usually forced to conclude that they have failed to take anything like an all-round view of the problem.

Next, we found that in many cases the child makes little or no attempt to furnish a logical justification of his choice. He has no "reasons" to offer, because he has not studied the pros and cons of the matter at all. The work simply attracts him, and all he can tell us is that he is *interested* in it and feels sure that he would *like* it. Further, we suspected that in many other cases the "reasons" offered by the child have been produced *after the event*, in order to justify to himself or to others a choice which is fundamentally a matter of feeling rather than of logic.

Indeed, our distinction between rational choices and choices based on feeling is not a very useful one; for even when the child gives a reason for his ambition, this reason itself is usually no more than the expression of a feeling or desire. One girl wishes to be a hairdresser because the work will give her "a chance to mix with different types of people." Another girl selects the same profession<sup>1</sup> for no reason at all except that the work interests her; but in her case also it may very well be that the explanation of the choice is to be found in the social impulse. The contrast is not between impulse and reason, but rather between an immediate, unanalysed appeal of the work to the child's natural desire in the one case, and in the other a conscious awareness of the desire and a deliberate selection of a job in which it will be gratified (if indeed the selection of the job has followed, and not preceded, the conscious formulation of the motive). In both cases the *desire* is the root of the matter.

Now, we have seen that, according to a widely accepted psychological theory, our desires depend fundamentally on our inborn instinctive endowment. The boy with a strong instinct of combat or of acquisitiveness may be attracted by the competition or the financial rewards of

<sup>1</sup> It has recently been argued that the hairdresser is a professional man and not a tradesman, since he is more concerned with supplying a service than with selling a commodity. Cf. *The Hairdressers' Weekly Journal*, 10th June, 1933. This raises the question of the status that should be accorded to the dustman and the shoeblack.



commercial life. Another, in whom the tender, protective impulse is dominant, may be drawn to work of a more directly philanthropic kind. It is true that the accidents of environment have much to do with the moulding of the child's aims and interests; we saw that two boys might have a very similar instinctive equipment, and yet the one might acquire an eager ambition to become a missionary on the Gold Coast, while the other might be just as strongly attracted to a military life on the Indian North-west Frontier. Nevertheless, the motive power in both cases can be traced ultimately to instinctive sources. A study of environmental influences may enable us to explain why the urge is seeking an outlet in the one direction rather than in the other, but the urge itself is part of the child's natural constitution.

If, then, the motives, conscious or unconscious, which determine the vocational choices of young people are instinctive in origin, is there any need to feel alarm concerning the results of these choices? What better can a boy do than follow where his natural instincts lead? Why should parents and teachers and psychological busybodies pester him to produce *reasons* for his choice of a career?

Human reason is a fallible thing. When we take thought about a course of action we often decide unwisely. Is it not safer to trust to "unerring instinct"? Will not Nature, if only we give her a chance, see to it that the child is

attracted to an occupation that will satisfy his desires?

Some such view as this seems to be held by many intelligent people. The child expresses a keen interest in a particular occupation, and, provided that his aim is not a theatrical nor an artistic one and does not otherwise conflict with the parents' preconceived notions of what is fit and proper, it is simply taken for granted that he has a natural "bent" in that direction. The parents are afraid of "standing in the boy's light." They must let him follow the promptings of his instinct.

Unfortunately, the matter is not quite so simple as that. There is perhaps no word in the English language that is more commonly misused than this word "instinct." It was recently written of the late Lord Birkenhead that he was "a lawyer by instinct" but had "no inborn instinct of statesmanship." Now, there is no such thing as an inborn instinct of law or of statesmanship. Our instincts were not evolved for the special purpose of fitting us to pursue particular occupations. It may be true that these strong primitive impulses of our nature find satisfaction—often an indirect or sublimated satisfaction—in our work, and that it is to their satisfaction that our enjoyment of our work is due. But it is quite wrong to suppose that we may safely leave it to them to guide the *choice* of our work.

As we have repeatedly noticed, the instinct

may be excited, not by the occupation as a whole, but by one particular aspect of it, or merely by its incidental advantages or supposed rewards. A tender-hearted girl, for example, may be attracted to nursing although she is too diffident or squeamish for such work or is otherwise unfitted for it in respect of her instinctive equipment.

But even if we could be sure that Nature would look after the instinctive side of the problem, it would still be unwise to leave the whole matter to her. For, in addition to the instinctive adjustment, there is the intellectual adjustment to be considered. Success depends on talent as well as on temperament. And when Nature, with the strong strings of instinct, tugs a child towards this or that or the other occupation, the child's attraction to the work provides no guarantee of his possessing the right *abilities* for the work.

Finally, what of our "abnormal" cases—the girl, for example, who longs to work among dogs because she has acquired a dislike of human beings, or to enter the teaching profession because she is afraid of growing up, or to become a great surgeon because she must needs find compensation for her intellectual inferiority in a delightful dream of successful achievement? Clearly, the motive in such cases has little enough to do with personal fitness for the work desired.

If, then, in our survey of occupational choices

and our psychological analysis of their motivation, we have been able to come anywhere near the truth, it would seem that there are many possibilities of boys and girls setting out on the wrong road.

Let us now look at the matter from another point of view. Granted that, so far as can be judged by study of the ways in which they choose their occupations, young people are often in grave danger of becoming misfits, do we nevertheless find, in actual fact, that they are usually quite well fitted for the work that they desire to take up? The boy, for example, who states that he wishes to become a university lecturer in order that he may be in a secure position, associate with educated people, have leisure to pursue other activities, and avoid the necessity of daily journeys in crowded trains—is he a boy who actually possesses the qualities of the successful university teacher, despite his apparent neglect to consider this not unimportant aspect of the matter? And the girl whose social instinct seems to be drawing her to the work of the hairdresser—is she in other respects a girl who will find that work congenial? In short, when we study the boys and girls themselves, and not merely their apparent motives, do we find that the number of those aiming at suitable occupations is vastly greater than our doubtless rather imperfect examination of the origins of their ambitions would lead us to expect?





**Intelligence and Vocational Ambitions**

This is a question to which no certain answer can be given, for at present there is no infallible means of predicting whether a person will be successful or unsuccessful in the work that he desires. But if we cannot achieve certainty, we can at least assess probabilities. For instance, it is possible, by means of certain psychological tests, to estimate the degree of a young person's general mental ability or "intelligence." It is also possible, by applying these same tests to large groups of older people representative of the different occupations, to discover the range of intelligence in any particular profession or trade. It is true that the actual abilities discovered among workers engaged in a job may not provide an extremely reliable criterion of the ideal ability for that job. Nevertheless, when a child's intelligence is discovered to be *markedly* above or below the standard commonly associated with the work that he desires to take up, we can state with some confidence that there is a probability of his choice being an unsuitable one.

How, then, do the vocational ambitions of boys and girls appear when regarded in this light? The evidence available is not of a very reassuring kind. For example, Feingold, after applying intelligence tests to a group of American high-school pupils, concluded that no less than 47 per cent of these pupils had chosen work which lay considerably beyond their mental reach, while 7 per cent had underrated their intelligence and

chosen vocations lying considerably below their mental level. "The lower an individual stands in mentality," writes this investigator, "the higher seems to be his vocational ambition" (11). Fryer, averaging the results of a number of inquiries conducted by himself and others in American schools of various types, finds that the chances of a young person's choice of vocation being suitable on the ground of intelligence are about fifty in a hundred (12).

Hawkins, in the English central-school study referred to in the last chapter, discovered that in 41 per cent of his cases there was some probability of the choices proving too ambitious or too unambitious.<sup>1</sup> In 7 per cent of the whole group of cases the probability of the choices being unsuitable was an extreme one.<sup>2</sup> Like Feingold, Hawkins concluded that "those below normal intelligence are choosing far more unsuitable occupations than those above normal" (15).

The present writer has made a similar study of the vocational inclinations (or lack of them) shown by one hundred boys who seemed to constitute a fairly representative sample of the secondary-school population at the school-leaving age. The psychological examination of these

<sup>1</sup> The "mental ratios" of these pupils were more than 15 points above or below the estimated average ratios of the workers in the jobs desired.

<sup>2</sup> The mental ratios of these pupils were more than 30 points above or below the estimated averages in the jobs desired. This is a very big difference. It is the difference between the averagely intelligent person and the high-grade mental defective.



boys included not only intelligence tests but also tests of certain special abilities (such as mechanical aptitude) and estimates of physical and temperamental characteristics. Ten of the boys had no vocational aim at all. Of the remaining ninety, forty-six (approximately 50 per cent) seemed reasonably well fitted for the work they desired to take up; the other 50 per cent (forty-four in number) appeared more or less definitely unfitted for the occupations chosen. Of these forty-four boys, twenty-one were judged unfitted for the work on grounds of temperament, ten on the ground of intelligence, six on grounds of special mental capacities, two on grounds of health and physique, and the remaining five on a combination of grounds (19). It is true that no infallibility can be claimed for the technique of the psychological examination, nor for the method of interpreting the results of that examination. But such figures as those which have just been quoted suggest at least a probability that the occupational choices of boys and girls are not in reality much more appropriate than we should expect them to be when we study the motives that appear to prompt them.

It is interesting to find that young people, when they are candid enough to give their own views regarding their temperamental strengths and weaknesses, often provide a picture which differs in important particulars from the picture of the temperament required in the work chosen. This fact helps to supply the answer to a possible

criticism of much that has been written in the foregoing pages; the criticism, namely, that although boys and girls may rarely refer to their personal fitness for the occupations they desire to take up, it by no means necessarily follows that they have not given careful consideration to this aspect of the matter—for is it not possible that the suitability of the work is simply taken for granted, since no sane person would wish to embark on a career for which he believed himself unfitted? That the suitability is taken for granted there is no doubt—but often, it appears, without its having been given any careful consideration at all!

### Is Vocational Guidance Necessary?

We must now face a criticism of a rather more weighty kind. Is it really of much importance, it may be asked, to discover that, let us say, 50 per cent of young people desire to follow careers that are unsuited to their talents or temperaments? Surely the important thing is to investigate the suitability, not of the occupations which boys and girls would *like* to follow, but rather of the occupations which they actually *attempt* to follow.<sup>1</sup> The job at which the child is aiming when he is interviewed by the curious psychologist during his final term in school may be a very different one from that in which he will begin his working life a few weeks

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted, however, that C. W. Valentine's technical college investigation, mentioned in the last chapter, was conducted among boys who had already embarked on their chosen careers.

later. During these fateful few weeks a variety of things may come between him and the goal of his desire. It is not altogether unlikely that he has a couple of parents whose plans do not exactly coincide with his own. Perhaps he has relatives, friends, teachers and other advisers who will take some small part in the making of the final decision. It is also conceivable that the prospective employer may wish to have a little say in the matter. The boy, for instance, who is attracted to journalism because he enjoys essay writing, but who is utterly unsuited by temperament for that vocation, will perhaps not be welcomed with open arms in the editorial offices of Fleet Street. As for these very ambitious young persons whose aims are far higher than their capacities, it would seem that their lack of the requisite scholastic qualifications must sometimes make it rather difficult for them to attempt to turn their fantasies into realities. Does it really matter if our backward girl longs to be a great surgeon? Why not let the poor child have her dreams? When she leaves school without having passed any public examination she will soon come down to earth.

And—so our critic continues—when boys and girls do leave school and come down to earth, what actually happens? Is it not true that the general kind of work they take up is determined largely by the social and occupational levels of their families? The elementary-school boy becomes a carpenter like his father, or a plumber

like his uncle, or a motor mechanic like his brother-in-law. And, since young people have very much the same abilities as their parents, it would seem that there is every probability of the family occupational level proving the right occupational level for the child. If the child is bright enough to win a place in a secondary school, he will usually take up some form of clerical work or of salesmanship—work, in short, which experience has shown to be suited to persons of his capacity and education. The public-school boy, whose relatives are engaged in higher professional or business occupations, will select his job from this group, and again the probability is that the choice will be suitable enough on the score of capacity. The great majority of occupations in each of these general categories demand just about the same amount of ability, and the great majority of people in the corresponding social grades are possessed of just about the same amount of ability. It follows that most individuals are well enough fitted for most of the occupations from which they are likely to choose, and that the odds are all in favour of their finding their proper level, even if they leave the matter largely to chance. As for the temperamental adjustment, would it not be ridiculous to maintain that quite different sets of instincts and sentiments are required in carpentry and bricklaying, or in pharmacy and banking, or in medicine and law? Here and there, no doubt, one may find important differences, but

most people have an average temperamental equipment and could settle down happily enough in almost any one of the jobs available to them.

Our critic has not yet finished his harangue. After all, he goes on, perfection is not to be looked for in this matter of occupational adjustment. When people say, in the words of an American writer, that "since work occupies one-half of the waking time of most individuals, it should represent the active expression of the whole personality," it is evident that they are talking sheer nonsense. There is no job in which a man can express his *whole* personality. Let boys and girls therefore content themselves with finding jobs in which they can be reasonably competent and can earn enough money to enable them to attend to their personalities in their spare time. We must remember, too, that even if the work is difficult or uncongenial at the start, a little practice at it will make all the difference in the world. People tend to develop the qualities that their occupations demand. If John Keats had stomached his surgery a little longer, he might have done as much for the art of the apothecary as he did for the art of the poet. And Claude Bernard, if only the manager of the Odéon had taken a more charitable view of his prentice efforts at dramatic composition, would doubtless have become just as famous in the annals of the theatre as he has become in the history of science. Finally, when a person does fail to settle down comfortably in his first job,



there is always the possibility of his finding another. A few unsuccessful trials will do him no great harm, and may even do him much good. Probably your vocational psychologist would *not* have recommended a seafaring career for Joseph Conrad; yet who will deny that the experience gained at sea contributed greatly to his later literary success? In short, the danger of young people becoming unhappy and inefficient misfits is an infinitely slighter one than the psychological investigation of their vocational ambitions might lead us to expect.

### A Critic Answered

Now, quite obviously, these observations contain some truth; and they help us to understand why so many people, despite the extreme carelessness with which they seem to choose their careers, succeed in finding work that suits them tolerably well. But they do *not* give us any reason to suppose that occupational misfits are a negligible minority and do not constitute a serious social problem. A whole volume would be required in which to deal thoroughly with our critic, but probably the thoughtful reader will have little difficulty in finding flaws in his arguments.

The parts played in vocational guidance by parents, teachers, and other advisers of the young, will be discussed in the next chapter. It must suffice here to state that many boys and girls do not avail themselves of the assistance offered,



and that some who do accept this assistance live to wish that they had rejected it. Employers sometimes recognize unsuitable applicants for positions in their service, but it is far from true that they accept only suitable ones. Careful experiments have shown beyond a doubt that the usual method of engaging new workers is almost incredibly unreliable, even when practised by individuals who pride themselves on being "good judges of men." "No better evidence is required," writes Hollingworth in an account of one such experiment, "than the spectacle of two different expert interviewers, one rejecting an applicant as the most unsuitable of a group of fifty-seven, the other selecting him as the choice specimen of the lot" (16).

Scholastic examinations are useful sieves, but they also are notoriously lacking in reliability. A very persevering young person can struggle through matriculation although he is seriously unfitted by intelligence for a variety of occupations to which that qualification opens the doors. As for professional examinations, it is clear, for example, that the successful negotiation of the medical "Finals" is no real criterion of fitness to practise as a doctor. "*Un concours exige des connaissances ; la vie, des qualités. Ce sont des choses très différentes.*"<sup>1</sup>

It is true that the child's choice is influenced by his social milieu, and that the higher social strata of the population have the higher *average*

<sup>1</sup> P. Chavigny, *La Vocation de nos Enfants*, Paris, 1928.

intelligence. But it is not true that any one stratum is composed of individuals who are fairly homogeneous in respect of their capacities. Modern psychology has demonstrated nothing more clearly than the enormous width of variation in mental characteristics not only in the community as a whole but also in any particular section of it. There is much evidence, too, that human abilities, or at least some of them, are inborn and cannot be acquired. Training increases skill only so far as the innate potentialities of the individual will permit. Practice alone will never produce perfection. Perfection, it is true, cannot usually be hoped for; in this matter of choosing work a compromise is generally necessary. But even if we cannot find an ideally suitable job, that is no reason why we should be content to drift into an unsuitable one. As for Conrad, is it not a little unfair of our critic to argue from an exceptional instance? Is it not likely that most people who embark on the wrong course find it impossible to profit by their errors, and that very many of them do not recognize their errors until they are too old or too heavily burdened by family responsibilities to have any hope of effecting a change? <sup>1</sup>

But let us admit quite frankly that the odds are against—doubtless heavily against—a person taking up work in which he will be an utter

<sup>1</sup> Gillespie writes: "The optimism of youth carries the burden well enough: there is always hope of better things in the future. It is in adult life and middle age that the effects of occupational misfit begin to be felt" (13).

failure. Does it then follow that vocational guidance is a matter of no great importance? The odds against a person dying of tuberculosis are considerably more than 1,000 to 1, yet it would surely be quite wrong to conclude that the National Association for the Prevention of Tuberculosis is making much ado about nothing.

### The Facts of Vocational Maladjustment

Let us now consider the actual facts of vocational maladjustment, so far as they are ascertainable, and see whether they afford confirmation of the conclusions suggested by our long discussion of the probabilities. What percentage of people actually becomes maladjusted? In what ways do these people fail in their work? What are the unhappy consequences of such failure? And are these calamities just bound to happen, or is there some probability that they might be foreseen and prevented?

As to the proportion of misfits in the general community, there are conflicting opinions and no exact statistics. "Failures are of many types," observes a writer on vocational guidance,<sup>1</sup> "and they are not always recognizable at sight. They include the adventurous spirit eating out his heart as a bank clerk; the Army officer whose heart is in Cambridge or Bloomsbury and who finds nothing but boredom in his work; the schoolmaster who may know his subject from

<sup>1</sup> M. Horsey in *Mental Welfare*, Vol. XII, No. 1, 1931.

A to Z but who has a constant nerve-racking struggle to keep discipline. Such men are failures from their own point of view no less than the man who eschews work altogether. And they may well be more dangerous to society; for the loafer is often a jovial fellow and no-one's enemy but his own, while the man who is working constantly against the grain lives in a chronic state of dissatisfaction which tends to spread itself to others." This writer goes on to point out that the need for vocational guidance is recognized by "our two most intelligent authors," Mr. Aldous Huxley and Mr. Bernard Shaw. In the opinion of the former, "enormous numbers of men and women are performing functions which they are not naturally suited to perform."<sup>1</sup> And here are Mr. Shaw's observations on the subject: "Shortly before the War a doctor in San Francisco discovered that if a drop of a candidate's blood can be obtained on a piece of blotting paper, it is possible to discover within half an hour what is wrong with him physically. What I am waiting for is the discovery of a process by which on delivery of a drop of his blood or a lock of his hair we can ascertain what is right with him mentally. We could then have a graded series of panels of capable persons for all employment, public or private. At the lower end of the scale there would be a panel of persons qualified to take part in a parish meeting; at the higher end a panel of

<sup>1</sup> *Proper Studies.*



persons qualified to act as Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs or Finance Ministers." <sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, there are those who take a less gloomy view of the situation. "The suitability of a man to his job," writes the reviewer of a recent book on vocational psychology,<sup>2</sup> "shades down by fine degrees from the rare condition of perfect fitness to the equally rare incongruity that the victim cannot endure. Most of us are only imperfectly adjusted to our occupations, but the serious misfits form only a fringe to a large body more or less suitably placed." And a prominent medical practitioner, when an attempt was recently made to interest him in vocational guidance, declared that he had found no reason, in his own practice, to believe in the need for such guidance. He could point to any number of men who failed to get on with their *wives*, but he had yet to discover a man who was unhappily mated to his occupation.

It may be questioned whether the man in the street, or the popular novelist, or the incurious medical practitioner, is in a position to arrive at a correct judgment on this matter. It is quite probable that the doctor whose views we have quoted has been consulted by a number of patients with "imaginary" physical disorders which neither he nor they recognized as being due to a wish to escape from uncongenial work by falling ill. As has been well said, misfits "are

<sup>1</sup> Preface to *The Apple Cart*.

<sup>2</sup> In *The Boy*, Vol. V, No. 4, 1933.



not always recognizable at sight"; nor do they themselves always know that the origin of their troubles is to be found in the unsuitability of their employment. Gillespie describes the case of a highly intelligent and perfectly healthy young woman who, having taken up routine work which failed to occupy her full attention and so gave her time to ruminate on her physical condition, developed hypochondriacal tendencies; and he goes on to say that "those who suffer in this way usually fail entirely to realize the very real part played by their occupation in their break-down" (13). Further, it is possible for a person to be a misfit and to cause suffering to others without himself suffering at all. The incompetent doctor whose mistakes are neither recognized by himself nor found out by his patients may earn an enviable income and pass as a remarkably successful member of his profession.

### **The Loss to Industry Through Maladjustment**

But there are certain classes of persons who have unusual opportunities of observing misfits and whose conclusions are specially deserving of our consideration. In the first place, there are the employers of labour and the students of industrial conditions whose duties take them into factories and other places where large numbers of workers are engaged. Their discoveries regarding the prominent part played by vocational maladjustment in the causation

of excessive labour turnover,<sup>1</sup> loss of output, spoiled work, absenteeism, sickness, accidents, and bad factory *moral* are recorded in many books and reports. It is true that these various conditions can be traced to a number of sources other than a real unsuitability of the worker for his task; but those with first-hand knowledge of them appear to be left in no doubt as to the real importance of the latter cause. Indeed, if proof be needed, it is not difficult to find. The matter has been put to a practical test in numerous experiments, some of which the reader will find reported in the admirable work from which the quotation at the beginning of this chapter is taken (28).

### Maladjustment and Nervous Disorders

In the second place, there is a class of observers who are more concerned with the damage which vocational maladjustment causes to the individual than with the loss which it occasions to industry. This class includes psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, and all who devote themselves to the study or the rehabilitation of broken-down humanity. Such persons, it is true, warn us against supposing that the man who breaks down in his work is necessarily a man

<sup>1</sup> Labour turnover is the ratio, usually expressed as a percentage, of the number of workers voluntarily leaving or dismissed from their jobs during any period to the average number of workers employed during the same period. An annual turnover of 100 per cent is not unusual. It has been estimated that in England the aggregate financial loss to industrial employers and employees from this cause alone amounts each year to one hundred million pounds. Cf. P. S. Florence, *Economics of Fatigue and Unrest*, London, 1924.

who has chosen the wrong kind of work. Just as there are many real misfits who do not themselves realize that they are occupationally maladjusted, so also there are many *self-styled* misfits whose dissatisfaction or failure in their work is due to personal difficulties that have no connection with the work at all. As Hanna and Fisher have pointed out, "much of vocational maladjustment is merely an aspect of the still bigger problem of emotional maladjustment. . . . Just because he does not know, the individual seldom assigns the true cause as the factor underlying his vocational maladjustment. He is dissatisfied, and simply because his work fails to give him the satisfaction he is seeking, he thinks his work is to blame" (14). The extreme case is that of the person described by a famous French psychiatrist as suffering from *phobie du métier*<sup>1</sup>; no job on earth will satisfy him, and his life is a continual flitting from one occupation to another.

On the other hand, it would be quite wrong to suppose that misfits are found only among a few thoroughly abnormal people in whom success is simply not to be expected. Doubtless they are more common among persons of nervous temperament than among those of more stolid constitution. But this does not mean that they are few in number; Culpin and Smith, in a study of various groups of workers, both manual and professional, found nervous symptoms in

<sup>1</sup> P. Janet, *Les Obsessions et la Psychasthénie*, Paris, 1903.

something like 50 per cent of their subjects (7). Nor does it mean that their troubles are inevitable and unpreventable; the same investigators, with the collaboration of Farmer, have conducted an inquiry into telegraphists' cramp, the results of which make it appear that this disabling malady is often due to nervous tendencies in the patient, *who, however, might have preserved his health and efficiency if he had chosen a different kind of work* (8).

### Maladjustment and Delinquency

Burt, in his fascinating book on *The Young Delinquent*, has recorded his discovery that working lads and girls are often led into *moral* difficulties as a direct result of their being misplaced in their occupations. He points out that, as a cause of juvenile misconduct, getting unsuitable work may be almost as serious as getting no work at all (4). "Every one who has worked among the derelicts of society," writes Burt in another place, "can testify how prominent a part is played by vocational maladjustment in human ruin—in the production of misery, of crime, of alcoholism, and of mental break-down" (5). Such a statement, even when made by a cautious scientific investigator, may be less convincing to some people than a table of statistics. In the present instance no statistics are to be found, and we must be content to note that, in the opinion of those who are well qualified to judge, the wrong choice of work is

responsible, not only for much economic wastage, but also for much human unhappiness.

A third group of individuals who are constantly brought into contact with occupational misfits, real or alleged, is made up of psychologists who specialize in vocational selection and guidance. Vocational *selection* consists in choosing, from the available applicants, the best persons for a particular job in the factory, shop or office. It is primarily a service to the employer. Vocational *guidance* consists in choosing, from the available occupations, the best job for a particular person—or, rather, in helping him to choose it for himself. It is primarily a service to the individual. We shall begin the next chapter by considering a typical group of misfits whose problems were investigated in the Vocational Guidance Department of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology. We shall thus be helped to see how far these problems may be preventable, and what lines the preventive measures should follow.

### Conclusion

The psychologist has been gently reprimanded for painting an unnecessarily lurid picture of the evils that he is trying to conquer. He has been compared, to his discredit, with the medical man, who proceeds quietly with his work of healing and wisely refrains from publishing to the world at large an alarming account of the ills that flesh is heir to. There is perhaps



some excuse for the psychologist; for the evils that he is fighting are too commonly ignored, while those attacked by the doctor are universally recognized. But we shall take the hint and spare the reader a whole harrowing catalogue of the dangers of unsuitable employment. Some of these dangers have already been indicated; others may easily be imagined. Let us, then, be content to sum the matter up in the comparatively mild language of one of the chief pioneers of industrial psychology: "Truly the whole social body has had to pay a heavy penalty for not making even the faintest effort to settle systematically the fundamental problem of vocational choice, the problem of the psychical adaptation of the individuality. An improvement would lie equally in the interest of those who seek positions and those who have positions to offer. The employers can hope that in all departments better work will be done as soon as better adapted individuals can be obtained; and, on the other hand, those who are anxious to make their working energies effective may expect that the careful selection of individual mental characters for the various tasks of the world will ensure not only greater success and gain, but above all greater joy in work, deeper satisfaction, and more harmonious unfolding of the personality" (22).

It is twenty years since Münsterberg wrote these words. For the most part, they remain true to-day, although some of the improvement

their author looked for has undoubtedly been effected in the interval. In the next chapter we shall see what this improvement has been, and we shall discuss the possibility of further advances in the difficult art of fitting the man to the job.

## CHAPTER III

### OCCUPATIONAL GUIDANCE

"What is needed is a teacher in each school . . . familiar with the modern scientific principles and methods of vocational guidance."

—C. S. MYERS, *A Psychologist's Point of View*.

THERE are many occupational misfits whose troubles, although serious enough, do not drive them into the hands of the police, nor into the parlours of the publicans, nor even into the consulting rooms of the psychiatrists. The psychologist engaged in vocational guidance encounters them in various ways. When he is investigating occupational requirements, he seeks out bad workers as well as good workers, in order that, by observing the differences between the two classes, he may discover the qualities conducive to success and to failure. In his "follow-up" studies of young people whom he has advised on their first choice of work, but many of whom have not followed the advice given, he finds that a considerable number report themselves as unsuccessful or are reported as such by their employers. And there are many people who do not seek his aid until they have come to grief in their self-chosen occupations and have decided to make, if possible, a fresh start.

The persons in this last category are subjected to an intensive examination, including a variety

of psychological tests, a comprehensive study of temperamental characteristics, and a careful inquiry into their past history. As has already been stated, the technique of the psychological examination is not infallible; but usually it is not difficult to ascertain the probable causes of the vocational maladjustment. Let us study briefly a typical group of these misfits and see what manner of persons they are and what circumstances have made them unhappy in their work.

### Case Studies of Misfits

The group consists of fifty consecutive cases of dissatisfied workers examined by the writer in the Vocational Guidance Department of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology. All but five are of the male sex.<sup>1</sup> Their ages range from 17 to 45. Their degrees of intelligence range from something near genius to something near mental deficiency. Their academic attainments range from those of the highly distinguished graduate to those of the backward elementary-school pupil; the majority, however, have had a secondary education. Their occupations include factory work, domestic service, retail selling, commercial travelling, the Army, agriculture, engineering, banking, office work of various kinds, industrial management, journalism, law, teaching, and the higher Civil Service.

<sup>1</sup> Women and girls are usually examined at the Institute by women psychologists.

### Unsuitability of Intelligence

In many cases the causes of failure are multiple, but if we select what appear to be the primary causes we can adopt the simple classification which we used in one of our studies of prospective misfits in the last chapter. In the first place, there are sixteen persons whose work is unsuited to their *intelligence*. Of these sixteen, ten have too much intelligence for their jobs. This group contains six very able young men who have taken up routine clerical work in situations where promotion is extremely slow and where the prospect of their being able to use their intelligence seems very remote. Two other members of the group are so deficient in character that there appears to be some doubt as to whether they could ever occupy positions suited to their brilliant intelligence, even if they were able to extricate themselves from their present blind-alley jobs. Then there is the bright elementary-school boy whose health troubles prevented his gaining a secondary-school scholarship, with the result that his educational deficiencies make it very difficult for him to find appropriate work. Finally, there is a window-cleaner who has given up a skilled job in middle life because he has grown tired of the continual travelling that it entailed. He has found that to change from one skilled job to another is not easy. In his spare time he employs his intelligence in the study of ancient philosophy, but during one-half of his waking hours his very



superior talents are devoted to the wiping of windows.

The man whose work does not make full use of his intelligence is not necessarily inefficient or discontented. There are persons of phlegmatic and unambitious temperament who are quite happy in occupations considerably beneath their proper level. There are also persons who prefer automatic work that can be performed almost unconsciously, leaving the mind free to think of other matters. "We have all heard," observes Dr. Maude Royden—who writes with first-hand knowledge of the subject—"of the miserable wretch who spends his life giving half a twist to a screw and knows nothing of the finished product of his deadening and intolerable toil. We have not heard, or heard with incredulity, of the man who *likes* such work and is perfectly content with it, preferring it indeed to any other."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, even when the intelligent person does find routine work uncongenial, there is always the possibility of obtaining compensations in appropriate leisure pursuits.

More pitiable is the plight of the individual whose work demands higher intelligence than he happens to possess. Our group contains six misfits of this kind. All six have made persistent but wholly unavailing efforts to succeed in professional or commercial occupations. For example, there is the "dull-normal" public-school boy who, having passed the school certificate

<sup>1</sup> *Christianity and the Crisis* (Ed. P. Dearmer), London, 1933.

examination at his fourth or fifth attempt, has become an articled pupil in a profession demanding more advanced studies than he is capable of mastering. After some years of ineffectual struggling, he has given up his job—at an age when, with his very specialized experience, he will not find it easy to make a satisfactory start elsewhere. Like the other members of this group, he is in a nervous, unhappy condition. But his slight temperamental peculiarities are the effects, not the causes, of his failure. Had his choice of work been a little less ambitious, he would doubtless have proved an entirely competent and satisfied worker.

### Lack of Special Aptitudes

Next, our group contains six persons whose failure is due to the lack of a *special mental aptitude*—usually of a constructional or literary kind—which their work requires, or who are unhappy because they possess a special aptitude which they long to use and for which their work affords no exercise. A boy with marked scientific and mechanical interests, for example, had been placed in a commercial office where he had found his work very uncongenial. Having proved most successful in a test of mechanical ability, he was advised to take an engineering training. He followed the advice and has made excellent progress. "My work," he now writes, "is my hobby." This boy also was in a distinctly unhappy condition at the time of the psychological

examination, but it is clear that his unhappiness was the result, and not the cause, of his occupational maladjustment.

### Unsuitability of Temperament

Our next category is a large one. There are no fewer than twenty-one individuals whose dissatisfaction seems primarily due to a *temperamental* unsuitability for the work in which they are engaged. There is the teacher, for instance, who has failed to keep discipline. There are the journalist and the commercial traveller who lack confidence and "push." There is the flunkey who lacks servility. And there is the exceedingly sociable young man who has taken up farming in a remote part of Scotland, where he has found the loneliness of his life unendurable. (He has since settled down happily as a master in a preparatory school.)

It is important to note that there are cases of temperamental maladjustment in which the dissatisfaction is due less to the unsuitability of the work itself than to unsatisfactory working conditions or unsympathetic personal relationships with fellow-workers or supervisors. If there were fewer misfits in the officer class, there would be less discontent among the rank and file. The writer has described elsewhere the case of a girl of very pleasant and superior character who was prevented from becoming a misfit in a laundry where, although the work would doubtless have suited her well enough,

she would have failed to adjust herself to her working companions, most of whom were of an inferior type morally (18). Another girl, a vivacious young person who was fond of excitement, had been neither happy nor successful as a clerk in various North London establishments, yet she became very contented and gave entire satisfaction in the office of a fashionable West End restaurant. Something in the Piccadilly atmosphere had given the work an appeal that it had lacked in the grimy regions of Islington.

### Other Causes of Dissatisfaction

A number of our temperamental misfits are persons who show some lack of general stability, but it seems probable that their dissatisfaction is due much less to this than to the marked lack of correspondence between their special qualities and those demanded by their work. There are, however, five additional persons who must be placed in a class by themselves. They are maladjusted to their jobs simply because they are *maladjusted to life*. They are so unhappy in themselves that no occupation, however well suited to their tastes and talents, would give them satisfaction. Their problems are problems for the medical psychologist, not for the vocational adviser.

In none of our fifty cases does the maladjustment appear to be due mainly to *physical* disabilities, although in a few cases such disabilities

are contributory causes of the failure. If industrial occupations had been more prominently represented, we should doubtless have found physical conditions of much greater importance.

There are still two members of our group to be accounted for. These are men who have been quite efficient in their work but who are dissatisfied with their *wages and prospects*. They would like to have "more scope"; but, as they are comparatively stupid people, it seems very doubtful if any other occupation would have brought them greater material prosperity.

### Motives for Choice of Unsuitable Work

Now, when we ask our fifty misfits to tell us what induced them to enter the occupations in which they have been so unhappy, we find that their motives are the old familiar ones that have been described in Chapter I and criticized in Chapter II. The discontented bank clerk had excelled in mathematics at school. The broken-down teacher was fond of children and wished to have a secure position. The unsuccessful commercial traveller thought it would be much more interesting to move about the country than to sit in an office. And so on. The choices were of the kinds that are being made by many thousands of boys and girls each year. Is it not likely, then, that the misfits who find their way to the National Institute of Industrial Psychology are only a small sample of a large body of



misplaced workers scattered throughout the country? And even if the more tragic cases are proportionately few, is it not probable that there is a great multitude of people who, although they find their work endurable, would have gained greater success and satisfaction if, with the aid of suitable guidance, they had chosen differently?

At this point the reader may be inclined to suggest that it is easy enough to be wise after the event; and it is certainly true that in some of the cases we have been considering it would have been impossible or very difficult for the most expert adviser to foresee the maladjustment at the time when the individuals left school and embarked on their careers. How can one predict, for example, that a boy of 16 will grow tired of a roving life at the age of 35? But it appears that, in the majority of the cases, it would not have been difficult to discover a *strong probability* of the choices proving unsatisfactory. When, in addition to studying the misfit as he is, one tries to ascertain what sort of person he was in adolescence, one is usually forced to conclude that he was not a person for whom one would have been at all inclined to recommend the occupation that he has been unfortunate enough to follow. And there are not a few cases in which it is abundantly clear that one could have foretold the failure with something approaching absolute certainty.

### **Treatment versus Guidance**

May we now conclude that vocational guidance of the young is a thing greatly to be desired? Not yet; for the very critical person who was introduced to the reader in the last chapter has kept two arguments in reserve. His first argument is this: A large proportion of occupational misfits would seem to be people who have failed because of their temperamental deficiencies. Such people are not normal. They are mentally ill. Obviously, then, the thing to do with them is to treat them and cure them. If we direct our broken-down teacher to work in which he will not be required to exercise control over others, we are merely advising him to run away from his difficulties. This is dangerous advice, and the probability is that the last state of that man will be worse than the first. The right course is to send him to a medical psychologist, who, in return for a fee of one thousand pounds, will have a short talk with him each day for a period of two years, by which time the patient will have become a normal person and, incidentally, a perfectly competent teacher. But, since prevention is better than cure, what is clearly required is the application of psychotherapeutic methods to all school children during their last years in school. All persons leaving school will then be entirely free from temperamental weaknesses, and there will be no danger of their choosing work requiring qualities that they do not possess.

There are two answers to this argument. In the first place, there is no justification for our critic's faith in the power of medical psychology to mould human beings to a standard pattern of perfect temperamental balance. It is extremely probable that many defects of temperament, like many defects of ability, are inborn and irremediable. Secondly, even if our critic's hypothesis were true, his plan of action would remain wholly impracticable.<sup>1</sup>

### Capacity and Opportunity

Having thus disposed of the problem of temperamental maladjustment, our critic proceeds to consider the misfits whose work is unsuited to their abilities. Here, he points out, we have blithely assumed that if, at the end of any school year, we classify the available jobs in the country or in any part of the country according to the capacities that they require, and then classify the candidates for these jobs according to the capacities that they possess, we shall make the fortunate discovery that, for some inexplicable reason, the two classifications exactly match each other. But surely this is by no means true. Is it not the case, for example, that there is insufficient room in the higher professions for the persons who are capable of

<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that the assistance of the medical psychologist, when available, may not be of the greatest value in certain cases. Young people examined at the National Institute of Industrial Psychology are not infrequently advised to seek such assistance before attempting to make a definite choice of occupation.

succeeding in this grade of work, while at the other end of the scale there is a vast number of purely routine jobs which cannot utilize the abilities of even the less intelligent members of the population? If, then, the distribution of the occupational opportunities bears little relation to the distribution of human capacities, surely any attempt to fit the individual to the job must be doomed to failure from the start. Vocational guidance will consist in telling boys and girls that they are fitted for work which they are quite unable to procure, and will therefore be much worse than useless.

The truth of this matter is difficult to ascertain exactly. Some people tell us that the result of the decline in craftsmanship brought about by the mechanization of industry is a great multiplication of jobs that are suitable only for the mentally defective; others point out that the work of attending to highly complicated machines needs distinctly greater capacities than were required by much of the manual drudgery of the past. Again, we are told, on the one hand, that modern educational facilities are increasing the number of persons who are qualified by training as well as by capacity for comparatively skilled work; on the other hand, we are assured that, owing to the declining birth-rate among the higher social classes, the number of individuals of low intelligence, and therefore of limited vocational potentialities, is becoming proportionately greater.

One thing seems to be clear, namely, that much nonsense is talked and written concerning the soul-destroying lack of opportunity for creative expression in modern industry. As we have already seen, there are intelligent persons who are quite happy in comparatively routine work; but there are also many unintelligent persons who are incapable of performing any other kind of work. "Let's remember the elementary facts of the situation," writes a business man with more insight than is shown by some self-styled psychologists. "All men are not boiling and seething with a creative urge that can be satisfied only by complete or nearly complete emancipation from routine and repetition." <sup>1</sup>

Some years ago Burt estimated that in London there was a close general correspondence between the numbers of persons employed in work of the several degrees of skill and the numbers of school children possessed of the corresponding degrees of intelligence, although there certainly seemed to be too little room at the top and too much room at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy (6). But industrial conditions are continually changing, and what was true of London then may not be true now. Moreover, what is true of London may be far from true of provincial areas. In his central-school study in the Midlands, Hawkins tried to obtain some light on the problem by investigating the jobs actually

<sup>1</sup> E. A. Filene, *The Way Out*. London, 1925.



secured by former pupils of the school over a period of five years, and comparing them with the jobs which appeared to be suited to the intelligence of the present pupils. He estimated that the percentages of present pupils fitted for highly-skilled, skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled work were, respectively, 21, 50, 27 and 2; whereas the corresponding percentages of old scholars engaged in work of these four degrees of skill were 0, 27, 39 and 34 (15). These figures are certainly very suggestive, although it is possible that some of the old scholars, with the aid of better vocational guidance, might have found more highly-skilled work, and that some, although highly intelligent, were in other respects unfitted for the more responsible positions.<sup>1</sup>

Let us agree with our critic that it is not to be expected that a vocational adviser working in any particular area will find, at any particular time, that the available vacancies are closely suited to the capacities of the candidates. Surely it does not then follow that vocational guidance is impracticable. If the responsible posts are too few for those capable of occupying them successfully, it would seem to be all the more important to prevent their being obtained by those incapable of occupying them successfully. And even if we are forced to direct many young people to work that is not particularly suitable,

<sup>1</sup> Business men commonly complain of the difficulty of finding individuals who are well fitted for high administrative posts, although there would seem to be no dearth of individuals possessing high intelligence.

we may still do much good by saving them from work that is particularly unsuitable. In short, we may admit that vocational guidance must often be extremely difficult and still hold that it may often be extremely useful.

### A Vocational Guidance Programme

What, then, are the main features of an effective vocational guidance programme? We must begin by educating parents. We must try to produce in their minds the right attitude towards the whole problem of vocational choice, in order that they, in turn, may encourage the development of the right attitude in the mind of the child. We must also educate teachers who will give systematic instruction in the school, designed to supplement—or, in some cases, to counteract—the instruction given in the home. Long before he reaches the end of his school course, the child should be taught the *principles* of choosing a career. He should be warned of the dangers to be avoided: in particular, the dangers of being influenced by superficial considerations and of trusting to vague feelings of interest. He should be given a homily on the characteristics of the wise vocational choice and on the manner of acquiring the information on which such a choice is based. This homily might well be preached round a text from R. L. Stevenson:<sup>1</sup> “I suppose the young man to have chosen his career on honourable principles; he

<sup>1</sup> *Lay Morals.*

finds his talents and instincts can be best contented in a certain pursuit; in a certain industry, he is sure that he is serving mankind with a healthy and becoming service; and he is not sure that he would be doing so, or doing so equally well, in any other industry within his reach. Then that is his true sphere in life; not the one in which he was born to his father, but the one which is proper to his talents and instincts."

Having inculcated the right principles, we must help the child to apply these principles in practice. We must help him to discover what are the particular "talents and instincts" in which he is relatively strong and weak; and to discover also what occupations are "within his reach," and what combinations of talents and instincts these occupations specially demand. He must be encouraged to investigate the nature and conditions of the work in the available professions or trades, and to inquire into such matters as the age of admission, the normal method of promotion, the opportunities of specialization, the nature and cost of the necessary training courses, the institutions where the training may be received, and the possibilities of obtaining any necessary assistance in the form of scholarships or bursaries. He should not be taught to disregard considerations of security and financial prospects, but he should be made to understand that these are not the only important things, and may not even be the most important things. When we have persuaded the child to study

himself on the one hand and the occupational opportunities on the other, the most difficult part of our advisory task may still remain to be accomplished. Many boys and girls, despite all our explanations and exhortations, will still allow themselves to be influenced by mere whims and prejudices; and many who do their best to study the problem intelligently will find it very difficult to discover the solution. We cannot expect a very intelligent solution when the child does not happen to be very intelligent; nor can we expect that the solution will always be easy, even when the child has no lack of ability. Rarely will one single job stand out as suitable above all others. Much more usually, a number of occupations will appear more or less appropriate, and it may be far from easy to arrange them in a definite order of suitability. It appears, then, that the adviser must be a person of sympathy and tact, who will patiently endeavour to guide the child towards a right decision, showing him where his judgments appear to be at fault and where his inclinations appear to be leading him astray. It may sometimes be desirable to restrain the child forcibly from attempting an occupation in which he is bound to fail, but always the aim should be, not to dictate to him, but rather to help him to make his own choice wisely.

Finally, we must provide some means of assisting the child to find a situation in the type of work chosen. There must be some person to

act as a link between the employer and the prospective employee, a person who will be closely in touch with the ever-changing conditions of the world of work, and will know what vacancies are available at any particular time.

In short, a sound scheme of vocational guidance must include, first, a means of conducting a careful and comprehensive study of the child's potentialities and attainments; secondly, a means of investigating fully the occupational requirements; thirdly, a means of helping the child to compare the available knowledge concerning himself with the available knowledge concerning the occupations, and so to discover the kind of work in which there is the greatest probability of his being successful and satisfied; and, fourthly, a means of introducing the child to a situation as nearly as possible of the kind desired.

### **Vocational Guidance To-day**

Let us now consider vocational guidance as it exists in this country to-day; and let us begin by observing the parts played by the parent and the teacher, who obviously have the best opportunities of studying the child's characteristics.

### **The Function of the Parent**

The parent has much knowledge of the world that his children do not possess, and he has much knowledge of his children that is not



possessed by any other person. No one can dispute his right or his duty to help his children in planning their future careers. No one can deny that he has a great opportunity of influencing them wisely. The pity is that, all too commonly, the opportunity is either completely ignored or sadly misused.

Parents frequently fall into the same kinds of error as do the children themselves, concentrating their attention on one aspect of the problem and neglecting to take the all-round view. "Too often the puzzled parent sees in a straw blown by a chance breeze the prophecy of a coming wind. His boy gains a school prize in English—and he is launched into journalism, although he is slow and deliberate rather than fluent with his pen, and is lamentably wanting in that energy and "push" which count for so much in his new job. And his sister, with all the qualities of the perfect saleswoman, tries with little success to adapt these qualities to the demands of a classroom, because she once coached her younger sister to success in an examination."<sup>1</sup>

In an experiment recently conducted among elementary-school children by the Education Committee of Birmingham, it was found that in approximately 60 per cent of the cases the occupational guidance given to their children by the parents was at variance with the guidance

<sup>1</sup> C. S. Myers, "Choosing a Career," *The Manchester Guardian*, 16th September, 1933.

offered by skilled vocational advisers. The children themselves suggested apparently suitable occupations more frequently than did their parents (1). The present writer's experience, which has been mainly among parents of the more highly educated classes, suggests that here also young people are, if anything, more likely to succeed in life when they follow their own inclinations than when they follow the directions of their fathers and mothers.

It is very easy to criticize, but it must be allowed that the vocational adviser requires much information which many parents do not possess and cannot be expected to possess. It does not follow from what has been written that parents should be prohibited from attempting to guide their children in this matter, but it does seem to be most important that they should seek the co-operation of those who may be able usefully to supplement their own efforts.

### **The Function of the Teacher**

One person who can give them much assistance is the teacher; and, as everyone knows, the members of the teaching profession do in fact perform a vast amount of valuable and devoted work in assisting their young charges to find their feet in life. Yet they too may have deficiencies as vocational advisers, as indeed they themselves are often the first to admit. Sometimes they appear to look at the pupil from a too narrowly scholastic point of view.

When they go to the trouble of compiling cumulative records of progress, these records usually contain nothing more than percentage marks gained in school examinations. Even when observations on temperament are included, they generally take the form of very brief notes of casual impressions, no attempt being made to give anything like a complete picture of the child's characteristics.<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to doubt that the school has much valuable knowledge which is not brought to bear effectively on the pupil's vocational problems, because it is allowed to remain inside the skulls of the staff and is not put down systematically in black and white.

The writer has found that many parents are inclined to underestimate the value of the assistance that can be obtained from the school. They point out that teachers, since they spend their lives among children and never come in contact with people who perform any work, are obviously incompetent to make useful suggestions on the choice of a career. But, whatever may be the limitations of his occupational knowledge, the good teacher cannot fail to acquire much knowledge concerning some aspects at least of the child's nature; and it is safe to say that if he were consulted more frequently there would be fewer occupational misfits in the country.

<sup>1</sup> A notable advance on common practice is seen in the school record card devised by the Education Committee of Kent (revised edition, 1933).

### Juvenile Employment Agencies

Another person whose ability to give valuable assistance is not always recognized is the officer of the Juvenile Labour Exchange or the Juvenile Employment Bureau. The employment officer is often regarded as a person who sticks pegs into holes in a rather perfunctory manner, with little regard to the shape and dimensions of the pegs on the one hand or the holes on the other. Cynical persons point out that, in his printed reports, he stresses the quantity of the work done and wisely says little about its quality; that he is inclined to take pride in the number of situations found for boys and girls, although this number is probably swelled by repeated demands for assistance from young people who have been wrongly directed in the first instance. In short, he is often looked upon as an individual who is concerned merely with *placement*, and not at all with *guidance*.

Nothing could be farther from the truth; for the numbers of children advised on the choice of work by the official agencies are vastly in excess of the numbers actually placed in employment by these agencies. The advice is often given at a conference held in the school and attended by the pupil's parent or parents, the head teacher, and perhaps other interested persons. It is true that the juvenile employment officer is often handicapped by the meagre nature of the available information concerning the child's physical and mental characteristics; and indeed, even if



he had a very exact description of the child, he would still be handicapped by the lack of a correspondingly exact description of the occupational requirements. He himself would not claim for his judgments any high degree of precision. But he has much industrial knowledge of a very useful kind that is not possessed either by the parent or by the teacher; and to ignore the assistance that he is able and willing to offer is certainly to make a great mistake.<sup>1</sup> A review of the work of the official juvenile employment agencies is issued annually by the Ministry of Labour; and no reader of it can fail to be impressed by the extent and variety of the schemes that are in operation throughout the country, not only for vocational guidance but also for the after-care of young people during their early years of work (20).

Information about the occupations is provided not only by the officers of the Exchanges and Bureaux, but also by means of printed handbooks and pamphlets, and occasionally by means of lectures, films, lantern slides, and organized visits to factories and other places of business. In these various ways much useful knowledge is made available to boys and girls. Yet many young people remain incredibly ignorant of the local opportunities; and the exact study of the *psychological requirements* of the occupations has scarcely been begun.

<sup>1</sup> It was the local knowledge of an employment officer that saved the girl referred to above from becoming a misfit in a laundry in which she had been advised to seek a position.



### Limitations of Existing Schemes

Our all too brief review of vocational guidance as it is conducted in this country to-day leads us to conclude that much useful work is being done but that there is considerable room for improvement. Perhaps the chief weakness of existing schemes is the lack of organized provision for helping the child to think out the problem for himself over a period of time, and gently and gradually influencing him towards a right decision.<sup>1</sup> When an attempt is made to decide a child's future in five or ten minutes, the work recommended sometimes being work that he has not previously heard of, it is to be expected that the advice will often go in at the one ear and out at the other. It is of no great use to ascertain the child's capabilities unless he is helped to *adjust his ambitions to his capabilities*; and this cannot be done by a small committee at a school conference, nor by an employment officer during a brief chat at a Labour Exchange.

Nevertheless, if the best features of existing practice were more widely adopted, if more systematic instruction and direction were given to young people preparing to embark on their careers, if parents and teachers co-operated more closely in an endeavour to obtain a true picture of the child's characteristics, and if parents and teachers on the one hand and employers on the other made fuller use of the facilities offered by the employment agencies, it

<sup>1</sup> There are, of course, notable exceptions to the general rule.



is certain that, without any aid at all from the psychologist, the number of unfortunate occupational choices could be materially reduced.

And yet, even if all this were accomplished, many a young person would still be misdirected at the outset of his occupational journey. The truth is that the diagnosis of a person's abilities and character is an expert operation, and that mistakes are bound to be made so long as it is conducted by the rather rough-and-ready method of common sense. This is why psychologists have in recent years devoted much labour to the discovery of better methods of estimating the aptitudes of the young.

### **The Psychologist's Function**

Parents and teachers often find it very difficult to see how it is possible for a psychologist to add usefully to their own observations of children who have been under their charge for many years. "It is a remarkable thing," writes Earle, "that the need for trained observers will always be conceded for practically every kind of observation except those of human beings. It is commonly understood that the finest instruments of the astronomer and of the chemist require the most skilled and practised of users. In striking contrast is the fact that many people imagine the observing and judging of human abilities to be a very simple thing" (9).

The reason is that, whereas astronomy does not enter into the daily life of the ordinary

individual, psychology is a thing with which he is continually concerned. Since psychology is the study of human behaviour, all men are psychologists, whether they know it or not. All men judge their fellows (with varying degrees of success) and express opinions as to how particular individuals will conduct themselves in given circumstances. And just because the forming of such judgments is a thing that they can do, after a fashion, by the light of common sense alone, it does not occur to them that they need any assistance from an expert.

Perhaps a comparison with medicine will help to make the matter intelligible. The general medical practitioner often finds it useful to call in a medical specialist. He himself has studied his patient for years, and has much knowledge of the patient's constitution and ways of life that the specialist cannot possibly acquire in a single examination. Yet the specialist, just because he is a specialist, can add something useful to the general practitioner's findings, even if it is only a confirmation of the latter's diagnosis. The specialist is greatly assisted by the history of the case which the general practitioner supplies, his own investigation being merely *supplementary* to those conducted by the other.

In much the same kind of way, the psychologist, although he certainly needs the help of the parents' and the teachers' observations, can often add usefully to these observations, simply because he is a person who has made a special

study of the human mind and has devised special methods of assessing some of the mental characteristics of particular individuals. At present these methods are tentative and imperfect. They do not make vocational guidance a simple mechanical process. They do not enable the psychologist to draw a hard-and-fast line between the occupations in which the child will certainly succeed and those in which he is bound to fail. They do not always enable him to fulfil the parents' expectation that he will discover swan-like qualities in the child whom others have diagnosed as a pure goose. The psychologist's procedure is not completely different from the procedure of common sense. At present his science is merely an aid to common sense. In some cases he is able to demonstrate the presence of abilities that have not previously been recognized. In other cases he is able to provide far more exact estimates of abilities and deficiencies that are already known. Sometimes he can shed new light on the child's temperamental condition. Sometimes he is chiefly of value by confirming the parents' and teachers' opinions of the child and by helping them to translate their findings into terms of occupational potentialities. Often his judgment is, to some extent, a guess; but always it has the merit of being based on a careful survey of *all* the relevant information ascertainable concerning the child on the one hand and the occupations on the other.

### **Experiments in Vocational Guidance**

In this country the value of the psychological methods has been put to a practical test in a number of carefully controlled experiments conducted by the National Institute of Industrial Psychology and by other bodies in co-operation with the Institute. Large numbers of young people have been examined and advised, and their subsequent occupational records have been investigated.

In some cases an investigation has been made also of the occupational histories of a "control" group of young people who were exactly comparable with those psychologically examined, except in that they did not receive this special examination. These experiments have clearly demonstrated the superiority of the psychological method to the method of unaided common sense. Boys and girls who follow the psychologist's advice are not only more successful than those who reject this advice, but are also more successful than those who follow the advice given in the ordinary way without the aid of the psychologist at all.

### **Vocational Guidance in Schools**

Much thought has been given at the National Institute of Industrial Psychology to the difficult question of how the methods of the psychologist might best be included in existing schemes of vocational guidance. The Institute suggests that the psychological study of the child, for the



purposes of both educational and vocational guidance, should be carried out in the school as a part-time duty by a member of the staff who has received a special training for the work. This specialist should not be content to conduct a single examination of the pupils towards the end of their school courses, but should compile cumulative records covering a period of years and containing not only results of psychological tests and scholastic examinations but also systematic observations on physical and temperamental characteristics, interests, hobbies, and so on. He (or she) should encourage the child to think out the problem of a career in the light of his (or her) cumulative school record. He should see that the pupils have access to all useful information on the appropriate occupations, and he himself should continually be accessible, in order that the pupils and their parents may bring their difficulties to him and receive any advice required.

But the school vocational specialist will not be in a position to acquire an adequate knowledge of the many specialized departments of professional, commercial, and industrial work. He will not know the peculiarities of individual firms, nor will he know in which directions the most numerous or most promising openings are to be found at any particular time. All that he can attempt to do, in co-operation with the parents, is to teach the method of choosing a career wisely, and to guide the pupil towards a

*provisional* decision as to the *general type* of work that he will take up.

In this way the school vocational expert will prepare the ground very usefully for the employment officer, who is the expert in the study of the occupations and in the actual placing of the child in suitable work. The decision as to the suitability of the work should be the *joint* responsibility of the school adviser and the adviser from the Exchange or Bureau. The latter will amplify considerably the directions already given in the school, suggesting particular openings in the class of work provisionally chosen, perhaps indicating other kinds of work suited to the pupil's characteristics, and, so far as possible, answering the pupil's and the parents' inquiries about wages, immediate prospects, and so forth. It would seem to be desirable that the employment officer should have some acquaintance with the psychological methods of examining the pupils, in order that he may fully understand the results of the tests given by the teacher, and may be able to co-operate effectively with the latter in the interpretation of these results.

The Institute has suggested also that an expert psychologist should direct the work in each area, assisting the school advisers in the examination of difficult cases, and assisting the employment officers in the analysis of occupational requirements. It is conceivable that the chief employment officer of the future might

be a graduate in psychology who could perform these functions of the regional expert.

Under such a scheme the National Institute of Industrial Psychology could doubtless be of service to the community by acting as a teaching and consultative body and as a centre for the conduct and co-ordination of researches designed to improve the psychological technique.<sup>1</sup>

These are large plans, and this is not the place in which to discuss them in detail. As was explained in the Preface, this small book is intended to be of an introductory character. Its purpose will be amply served if it should succeed in producing in the minds of its readers some degree of clarification of what is undoubtedly a very difficult and complicated subject.

<sup>1</sup> Already the Education Committee of Birmingham, in co-operation with the Institute, has begun the training of teachers in the application of certain psychological tests to elementary-school pupils. Such tests are used also in many of the schools administered by the Education Committee of Kent. In London the National Institute of Industrial Psychology, with the co-operation of the Education Authorities of Middlesex and Willesden, is training a small group of secondary and central-school teachers; and vocational guidance has recently been included as an optional subject in the curriculum of the Institute of Education, University of London. The Scottish Division of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology is about to establish similar training courses.

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